

CHAPTER

ONE

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Background

1.1.1 The Importance of Reading

It is for a fact that words play an important role in our lives, and therefore, a great deal of attention must be paid to reading. Aldous Huxley, in his study of 'Words and their meanings'(1962 : 6) , notes that words have the power to mold men's thinking, to canalize their feelings, to direct their willing and give rise to their acting.

Having realized the importance of reading, this study is concerned with determining the reading habits and interest of secondary school students in a rural and urban environment which later could be used to promote reading.

According to Dr.George Spache (1974 : 1-9), teenager's reading habit and interest, as well as preference for books and other reading materials are very much influenced by a host of significant factors

Among these factors are their home location , home environment, cultural background, parents educational background, family income and motives for reading.

According to Ruth Strang (1957:170-175), children's interest is the most important single influence upon their attitudes towards reading. This interest is a reflection of factors such as age, sex, background and psychological maturity. Interest being a dynamic and motivating force would then lead to action. Without interest, on the other hand, reading and readiness for reading are certain to be lacking. Interest can stimulate reading and a sustained interest leads to reading habits.

As we move into a world of computerization, complete with science and technology, one needs to be equipped with the ability to think critically, to reason, to analyze and to make judgments. Skills in developing and exercising these abilities can indeed be gained through reading.

Dr.Verne A Duncan, in "Reading and Successful Living"(1983:13),mentioned that, 'reading contributes to life roles in successful living, but the ultimate goal for each individual is that reading can give quality of life. In fact, educators

should not only emphasize the concept of “read to live” but develop the love of reading to the extent that students would want to “live to read” .

The school environment is important to encourage a conducive atmosphere for reading. Hughes (1973 : 22) states “ of all the skills taught at school, reading can be regarded as a tool skill, in a sense that a child’s progress in other subjects would depend considerably on his reading ability. Reading has come to hold a most significant place in education as a means of communication in a highly literate society. Reading helps enrich the quality of life.”

The Bullock Report (1974) gives three basic objectives in the teaching of reading:

1. The pupil would be able to cope with the reading required in each area of the curriculum.
2. He/She would acquire a level of competence which enables him to meet his needs as an adult in society when he leaves school.
3. He/She would regard reading as a source of pleasure and of personal development which will continue to be a rewarding activity throughout life.

The importance of reading lies in its functional values, developmental values and as a unifying force that unites social groups and cultivates positive attitudes.

1.1.2 The Teaching of English as a Second Language

The issue of how the declining standards in English could be arrested was thrust into the foreground when the Education Minister, Datuk Seri Najib Tun Abdul Razak delivered his speech at the Malaysian English Language (MELTA) Third Biennial International Conference in 1995(Sunday Star,28.5.1995).

The Minister declared that although all students were given the opportunity to learn the language at school level, the weakening command of the language has manifested itself in Malaysians playing a less assertive role in International forums.

In the education front, we are striving to make Malaysia the centre of excellence in education in the region . In doing so, it is inevitable that English becomes the vehicle for communication and instruction. Yet, on the home front students are faring poorly in the language (Sunday Star, 28.5.95).

One of the realities faced by the English teachers is the lack of reading by Students (Sunday Star, 28.5.95). The reading habit needs to be cultivated in students during their schooling years. Hence, strategies should be employed to make students avid readers.

The Minister also spoke on the effective build up of vocabulary, natural acquisition of structure and good expression that could be developed and enhanced through reading which is done in an unconscious manner.

In Malaysia, the National Education Policy in Malaysia is largely based on the Razak Report(1956) with the main objective of achieving unity through the use of a national language and a common syllabus. Bahasa Malaysia being the national language is used as a medium of instruction . As a result, English has been relegated to the position of second language.

Today, the Education Ministry has given recognition to English language and therefore has taken steps to ensure Malaysian students acquire proper communicative skills to enable them to participate effectively in the wider economic community. Under Vision 2020, Malaysia aspires to become a fully developed nation by the year 2020. Thus, in order to play a more assertive role in the international economic community, English language has been given recognition in the National Education Curriculum.

Education also includes the involvement of the private sector. Private education contributes and meets the country's human resource needs, in order to achieve Vision 2020. As opposed to public education system, private education uses

English as the medium of instruction. Students who intend to pursue education overseas are required to take the TOEFL Examination (Teaching of English as a Foreign Language) for admission. Its purpose is to test the English language proficiency of non native speakers who wish to study at institutions where English is required. As such there is definitely a need to place greater on teaching of English language especially at the school level.

As we enter the 21st century, drastic actions must be taken to improve the standard of English language. More importance should be given to the English language, as it is instrumental for development and advancement in economy, finance, health, education and science and technology. At school level, reading is the best strategy to bring about a marked improvement in the English language proficiency level.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

'He who ne'er learns his A,B,C,
Forever will a blockhead be,
But he who to his books inclined,
Will soon a golden treasure find.

(The New England Primer, 1930's)

Interest alone is not a sound basis for reading. Other areas such as reading disability, lack of reading, problems in language learning, types of materials to read and how much to read also influence reading (Spache, 1974: 64).

Reading disability is very real and no amount of motivation can overcome this handicap. Acquiring the competence in reading can prove to be easy matter for some children , whereas for others it is a problem. The ability to read differs from one child to another. According to Spache, some children do so poorly at reading that they may be categorized as “developmental dyslexia” (1974:68).

The linguistic process is especially important in reading. A significant part of becoming a skilled reader is recognizing the linguistic patterns. Reading includes both recognition of words and comprehension. However, in a rural environment language is a barrier to reading. There is lack or limited reading in the second language due to problems in language learning and poor linguistic ability.

An additional problem, especially in rural areas is obtaining English reading materials or a limited source of reading materials. The problem of unavailability of English reading materials can be solved by teachers who prepare reading materials to assist individuals with reading problems.

An important aspect in promoting reading in English among teenagers in Malaysian schools is to gather information about their reading habits and interest. This information could then be used in developing a suitable reading programme. Thus, the study is planned with this objective in mind.

The objectives of the study can be listed as follows:

1. To describe the type of reading teenagers do in an urban rural environment with regards to English language.
2. To investigate the pattern of reading habits and interest of teenagers in an urban and rural school.
3. To indicate the type of English reading materials (i.e. newspapers, magazines, books) that appeal to these teenagers.
4. To identify sources of English reading materials and the time spent on reading English reading materials, whilst taking into consideration respondents age, home environment, family income and parents occupation.

5. To identify the differences between the reading habits and interests of rural and urban teenagers and factors that influence them.
6. To gather and analyze relevant information which will provide necessary data for a description of reading habits and interests.
7. To draw inferences on the relationship between reading habits and interest of rural and urban students, reading habits and the home environment, reading habits and the socio-economic status, reading habits and family income, reading habits and parents occupation and reading habits and the languages spoken at home.
8. To be able to suggest ways in which reading English among teenagers can be promoted.

1.3 The Research Questions

For the purpose of this study, relevant data are required to answer the following questions :

1. How frequently does reading take place among teenagers?

2. What type of reading materials is popular among teenagers?
3. How much time is spent on reading outside school hours?
4. What are their reading preferences with regards to newspaper features, type of books , type of magazines and subject matter?
5. What are their purposes of reading or of not reading English materials and what motivates them to read in English or deters them from reading English materials?
6. Is there a significant relationship between their parents educational background, home environment, socio-economic status, accessibility of reading materials, languages spoken at home and school going teenagers' reading habits and interest ?

1.4 The Significance of the Study

The focus of the study is to identify the problem areas in leisure reading habits and interest. The result of the data analysis could then be used to develop programmes that would promote wider reading among the teenagers in a rural

and urban setting. Teenagers would then regard reading as a source of pleasure and of personal development which will continue to be a rewarding activity throughout their lives.

For many teachers selecting appropriate reading materials is a problem due to the differences in reading interest and habits among their students. This study would then lead to the discovery of students' reading interest and habits which are essential in the teaching and learning process. In selecting reading materials, teachers would then consider the various factors involved. The data gained could provide further ideas on what motivate students to become avid readers.

The relevant information obtained from this study would provide the necessary data required to answer questions in respect to reading habits and interest of teenagers in rural environment and reading habits and interest of teenagers in urban environment

1.5 Limitations of the Study

The following limitations are taken into consideration :

1. The sample of this study are school going teenagers between the ages of 15-18 years. They are chosen at random from the Form 4 and Form 5 classes.
2. Limitations of size of sampling, whereby only one urban school and one rural school are chosen for this study. Findings do not represent a complete investigation between all teenagers in a rural and urban school. The sample population for this study is limited to 60 urban school going teenagers and 60 rural school going teenagers.
3. This study does not include other variables such as attitude, general intelligence, sex differences and personality factors.
4. This study is confined to the reading habits and interest in English reading materials only.